



STATE OF IOWA

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OFFICE OF DRUG CONTROL POLICY
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New Iowa Report: Prescription Drug Abuse Rising, Underage Drinking Excessive, Meth Use Declining

The Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy today released Iowa's 2009 Drug Control Strategy, announcing new drug trend information that shows progress combating methamphetamine. However, underage and binge drinking continue at a high rate, and for the first time data clearly indicates that prescription drug abuse is a growing problem in Iowa.

"Thanks to the work of law enforcement, substance abuse professionals and policymakers, Iowa has made progress in the war against drugs, including making our state safer from the threat of meth" said Governor Chet Culver. "But we must continue to move forward and apply the same resolve to protecting Iowans from all drug threats, including the rise in prescription drug abuse. The Drug Control Strategy will help focus our efforts on both new and continuing substance issues in Iowa."

"Prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse is the fastest growing form of substance abuse in America, and now that seems true in Iowa too," said Gary Kendall, Director of the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy and Iowa's Drug Policy Coordinator. "Medicine abuse is not the only substance abuse challenge we face, but its rise at a time when meth use is declining demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive and holistic drug control strategy."

Kendall was joined for today's announcement by Kevin Frampton, Director of the Iowa Department of Public Safety's Division of Narcotics Enforcement and Kathy Stone, Director of the Iowa Department of Public Health's Division of Behavioral Health. Drug Policy Advisory Council members, who assisted in developing the drug control strategy, were also in attendance.

"State narcotics agents have worked 79 percent more prescription drug cases so far this year compared to all of 2007, and they've seized 348 percent more diverted pharmaceuticals—mainly pain pills—during the same period," said Frampton. "These are new investigations, in addition to meth and other drug cases that continue to keep our agents and drug task force officers busy."

"Substance abuse treatment centers are beginning to report an increase in the number of clients abusing prescription pain killers," Stone said. "Medicines are generally viewed by teenagers as safe, and many parents are not yet aware of the potential for abuse."

In response to the emerging threat, and in addition to current efforts, officials announced an educational initiative primarily for parents. The Iowa Prescription Responsibility and Education Project will include public service messages, brochures, posters, presentations and a dedicated web site. Iowa's new Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, a centralized database to electronically monitor pharmacy transactions, is also expected to go on line next spring to help deter the illegal diversion of prescription drugs.

While highlighting the emergence of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse, officials noted that alcohol remains the most widely abused substance in Iowa.

"Almost two-thirds of the Iowans entering treatment centers cite alcohol as their primary substance of abuse," according to Stone. "And we have one of the highest rates of heavy drinking by teenagers of any state in the nation." The National Survey on Drug Use and Health finds 12-17 year old Iowa teenagers "binge" drink (five or more drinks in one setting) at a rate nearly 11 percent higher than the national rate.

Methamphetamine continues to be a major source of substance abuse in Iowa, though many indicators point to progress in reducing meth activity:

- The number of treatment center clients citing meth as their primary substance of abuse last year dropped 34% from the year before, to the lowest number in a decade. A national study still ranks Iowa as having the ninth highest rate of meth treatment admissions in the country.
- Drug-related prison admissions last year totaled 795, a decrease of 10% from the previous year, and down for the fourth consecutive year, driven primarily by a 52% decline in meth-related incarcerations since 2004. Meth manufacturing/distribution arrests dropped below the number of arrests for cocaine manufacturing/distribution arrests in 2007.
- Child abuse cases involving an illegal drug in a child's body totaled 1,173 in 2007, down about 21% from the year before and 32% since 2004, due largely to less meth manufacturing.
- Meth lab reports continue to run about 90% below the record high level set in 2004 (14/month vs. 125/month), before passage of Iowa's Pseudoephedrine Control Act and other meth control initiatives. However, the DEA still ranks Iowa as having the 10th highest rate of meth labs in the nation, and recent reports from Iowa law enforcement agencies indicate the decline in meth labs may be leveling off or slightly reversing itself in some areas.

"Meth still poses a significant public safety threat," said Frampton. "For the first time in nearly four years, reported meth labs in 2008 are on track to slightly outnumber the total for last year."

"Iowa's Drug Control Strategy is a cohesive plan to reduce all forms of substance abuse, by sustaining success and improving efforts to address persistent or emerging issues," Kendell said. The report contains several proposals, including the following recommendations:

- Implement a real-time electronic pseudoephedrine sales verification system, to stop the practice of pharmacy "smurfing" in which people dodge the law to buy meth-making goods.
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of Iowa's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program by extending for one year the current June 30 "sunset" date, to allow ample time for gauging the program's true value to the wellbeing of Iowans once it becomes operational next spring.
- Develop a comprehensive plan to reduce underage and binge drinking, including possible policy changes and environmental prevention strategies.
- Regulate Salvia divinorum as a Schedule 1 Controlled Substance, to protect Iowans from this relatively new drug that can cause intense and debilitating hallucinations.

The complete 2009 Iowa Drug Control Strategy can be viewed at: www.iowa.gov/odcp.